

How to help your child



Listen to the child, let the child talk about his/her experiences, thoughts and feelings, even the difficult ones.



Create some daily routines and fixed times for meals, bedtime and so on.



Play with the child. Many children process distressing experiences through play.



Be patient. Children may need to talk about the same thing again and again.

Contact the child's child/youth worker, school teachers, school doctor or family guide, if you find that things are getting too difficult or the traumas are getting worse.

Contact

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Knowledge Centre for Vulnerable Refugees
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How to help a child with traumas

You are important

Mum and Dad are the most important people in a child's life, especially when children need help to process traumatic experiences. Once you know how traumatic experiences affect children, it is easier to understand their feelings and behaviour and easier to help them.

A normal reaction

The brain reacts to distressing experiences by producing stress hormones, which put the body into a state of alert. This helps us to think quickly and move quickly, so we can survive life-threatening situations.

If an experience is very intense and long-lasting, the brain, and sometimes the body, stays in a state of alert, even when the life-threatening situation is over.

Trauma can be infectious

Children can have problems, if they grow up with a mother or father who is struggling with traumas. Traumas can actually infect a family. In fact, children can contract the same symptoms as the traumatised mother or father, even though the children have not actually experienced the distressing situation.

Talk to the child

Many parents exclude children from adult conversations about distressing experiences and difficult emotions. By doing so, parents believe that they are protecting their children. But children sense much more than we adults are aware of, especially when something is wrong. They become curious and concerned when something is kept secret from them. So it is better to talk to children about both your and their experiences and emotions.



Reasons for traumas

Trauma is a normal reaction to abnormal events ...

- the death of parents or close family members
- witnessing war and combat
- personal involvement in acts of war
- witnessing violence or threats
- fleeing from one's home and country
- long absence from one's family
- physical injury
- experiencing poverty as a result of war

Children's reactions

Children react in various ways to traumas. Common reactions include ...

- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty learning new things
- aggressive behaviour towards others
- aggressive behaviour towards themselves
- stomach ache, headache, dizziness
- sadness and isolation
- monotonous or over-the-top games
- hyperactivity
- crying a lot, shouting a lot
- clinging to their parents
- waking up at night
- recurring nightmares
- fear of the dark
- fear of loud noises
- fear of being alone